

Flight

The Present State of Studies in the
History of Writing in the
Near East

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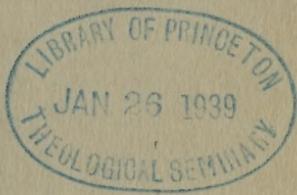
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HISTORY OF WRITING IN THE
NEAR EAST

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The study of the history of writing has value not merely as an academic pursuit, but as a clue to one of the most impressive chapters in the story of human intellectual progress. Next to the beginnings of speech as the most important means of communication among men, the origin and development of writing holds a place of supreme importance in the growth of civilization.

When limited to the Near East the subject has also a direct bearing upon Biblical study, since it not only raises questions concerning the time, place and nature of the earliest "writing" in the Bible, but it involves the study of inscriptions left by Semitic peoples related to the Hebrews in language, institutions and religious practices. These peoples, constituting the major population of the Near East during most of the second millennium B. C., were in that important period the most active agents in the creation and development of those particular forms of writing from which our modern systems evolved.

By "writing" is meant the recording or communication of ideas by means of symbols or characters, whether realistic or conventional, traced upon materials capable of preserving the impressions made upon them. Writing may be said to have begun as soon as ancient man first essayed to scratch, draw or paint on his cave-walls, or on stone, crude pictures of objects, animals, plants and trees, such as are found in various parts of Europe and Asia. Precise dating of such writing is impossible and we can never be certain that we have found the very earliest examples.

We cannot know all of the links in the chain of development from these rude beginnings, through the making of more or less standardized pictograms and finally to the formation of syllabic and ideographic symbols; but the process of such development is obvious, and an immeasurable period of time, perhaps millennia, must be allowed for it. In many instances it is still possible to recognize the original pictures or pictograms which lay behind the conventional symbols contained in such highly developed systems as the Egyptian hieroglyphic and the Sumerian cuneiform.

The natural starting-point for the study of the history of letters lies, then, in a consideration of these two systems which represent the oldest writing of consecutive records in the Near East known to us. Their origins go back beyond the fourth millennium B. C., and it is still a mooted question which of them is to be given chronological precedence.¹ Neither of these systems persisted without change, but each developed somewhat in the course of time and each embodied a fairly complex grammatical structure.

In the case of the Egyptian, called "hieroglyphic" or "sacred writing" by the Greeks because it was used chiefly by the Egyptian priests, there developed in time two other systems of writing, the hieratic and the demotic. The first of these, an abridged cursive form, owed its origin partly to the fact that the priests endeavored to monopolize writing for their own exclusive religious usage. Naturally, as business and trade grew in volume, the demand arose for a type of writing both divorced from the sacred and better suited to use in the making of records, contracts and mercantile communications, with the result that the hieratic system came into use.² Somewhere about the seventh century B. C. the hieratic gave place to a more popular, simplified form of writing

known as demotic. By about the third century B. C., with the spread of Greek writing, Egyptian came to be written with Greek characters, giving rise to the Coptic script, though certain traces of demotic may be seen in the Coptic system in cases where additional characters, lacking in the Greek alphabet, were needed.³

Early in the period of the Old Kingdom (c. 3000 B. C.) the Egyptian hieroglyphic had come to include twenty-four signs which stood for separate letters or uni-consonantal words, thus constituting a sort of alphabetic system within the larger body of syllabic signs. The Egyptians, however, did not recognize the great value of this invention if used independently, and they consequently clung to the cumbersome hieroglyphic system. Yet, as we shall see, this incipient alphabet of the Egyptians⁴ was destined in time to furnish the idea for the creation of a true alphabetic system which has had a continuous history of development down to our own day.

Sumerian cuneiform writing also underwent considerable change as it passed into the hands of the Accadians, Babylonians, Assyrians and early Persians. There have been instances of the adaptation of cuneiform for use in Hittite and Mitannian. The signs used in these secondary systems became so highly conventionalized that it is often quite impossible to identify them either with the basic Sumerian characters or with the original pictures out of which they grew.⁵

An early alphabetic cuneiform (16-14th centuries B. C.) has been found, to which reference will be made below, but it does not appear to bear any direct relation to the cuneiform systems of which we have been speaking.

In spite of Egyptian military dominance over much of the region east of the Mediterranean during the second millennium B. C., the Accadian cuneiform, rather than the Egyptian writing, was used by officers of the Egyptian

court in correspondence with certain petty Palestinian rulers who were subject to Egypt, as well as with rulers of other Near Eastern countries. Indeed, despite the development of other (especially of simpler alphabetic) forms of writing during this period, the cuneiform became the *lingua franca* of virtually the whole Near East.

The Egyptians' use of cuneiform is illustrated by the discovery in 1888 of the Tell el-Amarna letters,⁶ containing correspondence between Pharaohs Amenophis III and IV and the governors of Palestinian subject-provinces. Subsequent finds of additional tablets of the Amarna type have been made at several sites in Palestine and Syria, though the cuneiform on tablets of the eighth and seventh centuries B. C. is quite distinct in script and orthography from that of the Amarna period since there was an interruption of some five centuries in the use of cuneiform in Palestine until the eighth century B. C.⁷ New materials written in both the Egyptian hieroglyphic and the Mesopotamian cuneiform are yearly being added, literally by the thousands, to the great store already known, as a result of continuing excavations of ancient sites.

Other early systems of writing employed at various times and by diverse peoples of the Near East are represented by the Cretan hieroglyphic and linear scripts, the Hittite and Byblian hieroglyphic scripts.⁸ These, however, seem to antedate the Egyptian or the Sumerian systems, and their exact relation to these older systems is as yet a matter of conjecture.

Alphabet Writing

At a time near the beginning of the second millennium B. C., perhaps even earlier, the use of an alphabet for writing was introduced, and from this time on, as we learn from the increasing number of recent discoveries of

alphabetic inscriptions, the history of writing in the Near East becomes increasingly identical with the history of the alphabet. Although non-alphabetic writing persisted quite far beyond the date of introduction of the alphabet, there began a gradual replacement of the former by the latter, a process which was well under way by the end of the second millennium.

Accordingly, we may now take up consideration of the evidences and problems relating to the study of origin and development of alphabetic writing. A little more than twenty years ago there began a new era of research into this subject, thanks to the appearance of a remarkable succession of epigraphic discoveries whose volume continues to increase each year.⁹ Previous to 1916 the earliest inscription recognized as alphabetic was the famous Moabite Stone of King Mesha, discovered in 1868 and dating from about the middle of the ninth century B. C.¹⁰ To be sure, the existence of a fairly well-developed alphabetic script on this stone presumes a period of some years, if not centuries, at least, for the script to have assumed the form shown thereon. But the Moabite Stone constituted the starting-point for the study of alphabetic writing so far as Near Eastern epigraphic remains were concerned.

In 1904-05 occurred an epochal discovery which was not recognized as such until about a decade later. Sir W. M. Flinders Petrie unearthed some fragments of inscriptions in the region of the turquoise mines which had been worked in ancient times by the Egyptians at Serabit el-Khadem on the Sinai peninsula, about fifty miles from the traditional site of Mt. Sinai.¹¹ Subsequent additions to the original find were made by the Harvard expeditions of 1927, 1930 and 1935¹² and a Finnish expedition in 1929, so that there is now available a considerable quantity of materials for study of the problems raised by

these inscriptions. Attempts were made to identify the script, but without success, since the "unknown characters" in which the inscriptions were written, while resembling Egyptian hieroglyphic, were unintelligible when treated as Egyptian writing. It remained for A. H. Gardiner in 1916, ten years after the original discovery, working on the theory that the texts represented an alphabetic script, to decipher the name of the goddess Ba'alat (identified with the Egyptian Hathor) as the first definitely legible word.¹³ An extensive literature of comment and interpretation has since been called forth, most of which confirms and supplements Gardiner's original decipherment.¹⁴

The present net result of all these labors is a fairly unanimous agreement among scholars that in the Proto-sinaitic inscriptions¹⁵ we have the earliest known attempts at purely alphabetic writing, dating from the end of the 19th or beginning of the 18th century B. C., in the 12th Egyptian dynasty.¹⁶

The script is now fully believed to be based ultimately upon Egyptian hieroglyphic,¹⁷ from which some at least of the characters of the "incipient Egyptian alphabet," referred to above, were used as true alphabetic symbols, the letters being given Semitic names and values; that is to say, the acrophonic principle was employed, by which each sign was given a phonetic value corresponding to the sound of the initial letter of its (Semitic) name.¹⁸ As illustrating the method, Cowley points out¹⁹ that "the sign (ם) for *beth* was no doubt copied from Egyptian מ = h, but the value was Semitic *bêth* (b)."

The language of the inscriptions is taken therefore to be Semitic, representing an early form of that found later in Phoenician inscriptions. The evidence seems to show that the originators of the Serabit alphabet did not merely appropriate the Egyptian "alphabetic" signs; they uti-

lized only the alphabetic idea inherent in the Egyptian uni-consonantal signs, thus composing for their own (Semitic) language a system of simple signs with which words could be spelled.²⁰

An altogether new theory was proposed in 1933 by J. Leibovitch,²¹ suggesting a Meroitic (Cushite) authorship for the Serabit texts. After giving his reasons for rejecting the views of several scholars who assigned the texts to various Semitic tribes, Leibovitch discusses the possibilities of his new position. He continues to hold to the alphabetic character of the inscriptions, but argues that their phonetic values are not dependent upon the acrophonic principle. He believes that the adaptation of the signs to a Semitic language came later, when the acrophonic use was brought in as well as a change in phonetic values.

Dr. Leibovitch's monograph has evoked direct replies from Prof. W. F. Albright and Prof. R. F. Butin. Prof. Albright says: "While the thesis is defended with no little learning, it breaks down because of the fact that the oldest Meroitic inscriptions in the epichoric alphabet do not antedate cir. 200 B. C., and that not a single inscription has yet been found in Nubia from the preceding two thousand years except in Egyptian hieroglyphics, though numerous excavations have been undertaken there. Against these circumstances a few superficial similarities are of no weight."²²

Prof. Butin remarks: "Whether its application (i. e. Leibovitch's theory) will yield better results than others remains to be seen. It seems to me that the great difficulty experienced in translating the inscriptions from a Semitic point of view is not sufficient to compel us to conclude that they are not Semitic. The texts are very short and at times defective and there is hardly a Phoenician (or Semitic) inscription which does not contain

obscure elements which remain as yet unexplained. . . . The date assigned by Leibovitch to the Protosinaitic inscriptions seems to be too late. (Dr. Leibovitch sees in them a case parallel to the later Meroitic inscriptions. . . . The Maziou, equated by him with the Midianites(!), originally living southeast of Egypt were employed at Serabit under the XVIIIth dynasty and later.) The Gezer fragment could not be later than the end of the 2nd Bronze Age (seventeenth century). Since Leibovitch agrees that the Phoenician alphabet is derived from the Protosinaitic, sufficient time must be allowed for the passage from the one alphabet to the other. It seems to me very difficult to account for the change of phonetic values and the development of a new system in such a short period.”²³

The theory of Semitic authorship of the Protosinaitic inscriptions and therefore the possible origination of the alphabet by Semites appears thus to hold the balance of favor.

The question has naturally arisen in the minds of students of the Bible: what connection has this theory with the Biblical references to the earliest “writing” attributed to Moses at Sinai?²⁴ Conservative interpreters have readily replied that the epigraphic discoveries at Sinai offer striking proof that Moses must have written the record assigned to him there. Some have ventured to assert that he may well have known and used the Protosinaitic alphabet!²⁵

Support was given to such conclusions by certain extreme and fanciful interpretations which were put upon the inscriptions at an early point in the investigations, especially those of H. Grimme.²⁶ This scholar claimed to find in the texts the names Yahu, Moses, Sinai, but it has been amply shown by the careful work of other scholars, notably K. Sethe, that such readings have no factual basis whatever.²⁷

Although the circumstance of finding these evidences of the earliest Semitic alphabetic writing at Sinai is highly dramatic and lends itself to many interesting speculations, it must be said that no part of the available evidence throws any direct light upon the use of letters by Moses and the Israelites of his day. Certainly no hasty or categorical conclusions in this direction are justified at the present stage of the inquiry.

Before leaving the subject of the Protosinaitic inscriptions brief notice should be taken of a variant view of the origin of the Semitic alphabet by two French scholars, Dussaud and Dunand. The former, in the course of a review of Benzinger's third edition of *Hebräische Archäologie*,²⁸ says: "It is not at Sinai that the origin of the Phoenician alphabet is to be sought: the inscription of Ahiram, contemporaneous with Ramses II, clearly supports this hypothesis. . . . M. Montet's discovery should lead us to the tangible reality. . . . It is quite evident that Byblos offers all the required conditions to bring about the elaboration of the alphabet, for here there existed a strongly organized college of priests."

Dunand, basing his view upon epigraphic materials far antedating the Ahiram epitaph, claims an early Byblian (hieroglyphic) script as the possible progenitor of the Phoenician alphabet. This script, discovered in 1930 on a stone stele at Byblos²⁹ and slightly later on copper plates, presented a hitherto unknown type of writing, recognized as syllabic because of the eighty or more characters employed, and presumably bearing some resemblance to Egyptian hieroglyphs. The language appears to be an early form of Canaanite (Phoenician), and both Dunand and Albright date the texts near the end of the third millennium B. C.³⁰ Following this discovery came Dunand's publication of an alphabetic inscription from Byblos which has been dated about 1400 B. C.³¹ Com-

paring the characters of the Byblian hieroglyphic texts with those of the above-mentioned Byblian alphabetic text and with later Phoenician texts, notably the Ahiram sarcophagus text, Dunand believes that there is apparent here a direct line of descent for the Phoenician alphabet.

There is some plausibility in Dunand's conjecture, since the development of the Semitic alphabet during the second millennium B. C. seems to have been in a Phoenician dialect.³² Besides, the Syrian littoral with its highly developed culture in the second millennium, and a well-organized and active priestly literary school might conceivably have been the centre from which strong influences along this line emanated. But two considerations urge caution in accepting Dunand's view. First, the South Semitic as well as the North Semitic alphabet shows development from Protosinaitic sources originally, and the South Semitic gives evidence of having been derived independently from the Protosinaitic and not from the Phoenician.³³ Second, it is possible to demonstrate, by listing in chronological series the important alphabetic inscriptions found in the Near East, that from the Protosinaitic onwards there appears a progressive development of alphabetic writing, illustrated by materials now available from almost every century of the second millennium.³⁴ The most recent refutation of Dunand's theory has been given by Albright,³⁵ in which the conclusion is expressed: "a survey of the present epigraphical situation in Palestine, where we now have a bridge thrown across the gap between the proto-Sinaitic inscriptions and those of the Early Iron Age, shows that the true source of the Phoenician alphabet is to be found in the alphabetic script first discovered in Sinai."

One other recent attempt to trace the chronology of Palestinian epigraphy may be reported, that of T. H. Gaster.³⁶ Enumerating the difficulties in the way of con-

structing an accurate chronological series of inscriptions on the data at present available, Gaster proposes an epigraphic sequence, and in many cases he accepts the risk of neglecting valuable stratigraphical evidence for the dating of materials. His theory of descent for the Phoenician alphabet "in part from the earlier 'Sinaitic' script" and after the 13th century in turn influencing "the then prevalent 'Sinaitic' script" involves assumed relationships among the scripts which are hardly justified by existent evidence, and leads rather to confusion than to clarity. In the second part of his article is given a plate³⁷ showing his proposed arrangement of the chronology of early Palestinian scripts, tracing them all back to Aegean Linear writing and thus reviving Petrie's early theory of alphabetic origins.³⁸ There are many suggestive points in Gaster's discussion, but they are mixed with so many premature conclusions as to be misleading. His references to the growing literature on Palestinian epigraphy are numerous and constitute a valuable bibliography on the subject down to 1935. The comparative tables which he presents are of interest though not always convincing. There has been no general acceptance of Gaster's stylistic classification.³⁹

A new, important and illuminating chapter in the history of writing was opened with the discovery in 1929 at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit, on the Syrian coast opposite the easternmost cape of Cyprus) of a wealth of clay tablets written in a hitherto unknown cuneiform alphabet of thirty characters.⁴⁰ Identification of the characters was soon achieved, owing to the masterly work of H. Bauer and P. Dhorme,⁴¹ and it was not long before attempts were made by various scholars to trace this new alphabet to its genesis. Several of the earlier systems of writing were cited as possible models for its creation, but none of the theories of genetic relationships has proved en-

tirely satisfactory.⁴² Perhaps the most that can be said is that the Ras Shamra alphabet was constructed on the analogy of the Phoenician by writers who were accustomed to the use of clay and stylus which were not adaptable to the writing of the linear characters of the Phoenician. Z. S. Harris⁴³ makes the significant observation that "one of the best indications of the dependence of Ras Shamra upon the Phoenician is the non-indication of vowels in that script." This absence of vowels, he points out, while historically quite natural in the Phoenician, really has no *raison d'être* in the Ras Shamra, except as the latter was inspired by the former and "followed it even in this, unnecessary, respect." Noteworthy also is the remark of Prof. J. A. Montgomery⁴⁴ that "this cuneiform alphabet appears to have arisen upon suggestion from and in competition with the Phoenician alphabet which was already in existence; similarly the Persian cuneiform alphabet was an adaptation of the idea of the far-flung Aramaic alphabet to cuneiform. Both attempts failed before the simpler alphabets."⁴⁵

As additional texts from Ras Shamra come to light and their interpretation proceeds, they are proving of inestimable value in many fields of research, including pre-Greek mythology, Near East and Egyptian archaeology and history, Semitic philology, Old Testament science and history of religion. A constant succession of important studies by various experts in all of these fields has appeared and continues to grow.⁴⁶

Most pertinent to the present treatment are the Semitic tablets, especially the epic and mythological texts, which are yielding a rich store of valuable data on the pre-biblical history, religion and language of Canaan. Many close parallels and analogies, both in language and thought, are found to exist between these texts and the later books of the Old Testament, notably Isaiah (late

portions), Ezekiel, Daniel, Job, certain Psalms and passages in Proverbs. This *rapprochement* with the late biblical writings gives support to the view that, although the earliest traditions of the Hebrews (*i. e.*, Pentateuchal traditions) were brought in part at least from Mesopotamia, a growing Canaanite influence came into Israelite literature after the entrance of the tribes into Canaan; and this influence finds fullest expression in such books as are mentioned above.⁴⁷

We pass now to a tabulation and brief discussion of the epigraphic evidence bearing upon the history of writing in the Near East as furnished by the alphabetic inscriptions most of which have come to light within the past two decades. Below is given a chronological list of the most important inscriptions, with dates assigned as nearly as present study can determine them. The dates are set down with no claim to finality; some of them are subject to revision, and while not all students of the subject will agree on all of our assigned dates, it is felt that they represent a fair consensus of scholarly judgment. It will be noticed that our list carries us down to the sixth century B. C. and is confined to the alphabetic development among Semites in Palestine and Syria where activity in this field was greatest if not fairly exclusive. It lies beyond the scope of this chapter to deal with the scripts of Arabia, North Africa, Asia Minor, Greece and the islands of the Mediterranean. For these phases of the subject, where not discussed elsewhere in this volume, as well as for the development of modern alphabets from the Phoenician and so ultimately from the Sinaitic, the reader may be referred to H. Jensen's *Geschichte der Schrift* as perhaps the best general treatment.

Century B. C.

1. Protosinaitic inscriptions of Serabit.....	19-18
2. Gezer fragment ⁴⁸	17-16

Century B. C.

[3. Ras Shamra alphabetic cuneiform.....	16-14]
4. Beth Shemesh ostracon.....	15-14
5. Byblos alphabetic texts.....	15-14
6. Tell ed-Duweir (Lachish) ewer and bowl inscriptions	14-13
[7. Balu'ah stele (undeciphered; alpha- betic?)	(?) 14-12]
8. Tell el-Hesi inscription.....	13-12
9. Yehimilk inscription (Byblos).....	(?) 12
10. Ahiram sarcophagus (Byblos).....	12-11
11. Roueisseh spearhead inscription.....	11
12. Gezer calendar tablet.....	10
13. Abibaal inscription (Byblos).....	10
14. Elibaal inscription (Byblos).....	10
15. Samaria ostraca.....	9-8
16. Moabite stone.....	9
17. Kilamuwa inscription (N. Syria).....	9
18. Siloam inscription.....	8
19. Jerusalem (Ophel) ostracon.....	7
20. Lachish letters (Tell ed-Duweir).....	6

The point of greatest significance for the theory of epigraphic development represented by the above table is the fact that the Gezer fragment, found in 1929 and dating from the Middle Bronze Age, shows a very close similarity, in the forms of its letters, to the Protosinaitic inscriptions.⁴⁹ It is therefore the earliest example yet found which furnishes a connecting link between the Semitic alphabet and its progenitor, the Protosinaitic. Moreover, it is possible to discern the developmental relation between the letters of the Late Bronze inscriptions and those of the Gezer fragment, the former showing an advance toward the later linear characters of the Phoenician alphabet. The evidence on this point is convincing⁵⁰ and leads to the conclusion that a more or less regular

series of developments in alphabetic writing is to be seen running from the Protosinaitic on through the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and finally, as our table shows as well as epigraphic and stratigraphic evidences which grow increasingly clear and palpable as the process goes forward, on into the Iron Age. Ultimately, of course, this development continued to our own alphabet as the latest descendant from the Sinaitic source. The separate items, especially those from the second millennium B. C., as they have accumulated, may be likened to the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which as they are studied find their places in the picture. Many pieces, of course, are still missing and the picture is far from being complete, but even the early examples reveal sufficient standardization of letter-forms to enable epigraphers to reach a fair degree of unanimity in the decipherment of the inscriptions.

Naturally, the difficulties involved in fixing the exact dates of inscriptions have led to wide differences among scholars. For example, the question of priority between the Beth Shemesh ostracon and the Lachish inscriptions is a case in point.⁵¹ Likewise it is somewhat problematical whether the Byblos alphabetic inscription preceded or followed the Tell el-Hesi one, although Albright's evidences and conclusions would seem quite convincing.⁵²

Notice should be taken at this point of the enigmatic Balu'ah stele, discovered in Moab in 1931.⁵³ This inscription remains undeciphered and has up to the present defied classification either as to exact date or epigraphic relationships. The characters in its four lines, inscribed above a relief portraying three figures, are faint, well-nigh illegible, and so poorly preserved that it is not known whether they represent an alphabetic or a syllabic script. It was at first supposed that some of the characters resembled the Thamudic and Safaitic scripts of North Arabia.⁵⁴ Drioton, on the basis of the Egyptianizing style of the symbols and clothing depicted in the relief beneath

the text, placed the stele "not earlier than the beginning of the twelfth century B. C."⁵⁵ Albright has recently proposed a revolutionary idea, that of separating the text from the relief and dating the former in the late third millennium B. C., classifying it as possibly a variant of the Byblian syllabic script.⁵⁶ T. H. Gaster has hazarded a provisional analysis of the text and comparison with other Semitic scripts.⁵⁷ He regards the script as descended from "Palestinian Linear" and as a "pen-alphabetic" type of writing. But until a more satisfactory reading and classification of this text is reached it cannot be fitted into our present picture of the history of writing.

Few serious differences of opinion exist among scholars with reference to dating the remaining inscriptions listed in our table, and bibliographic mention will be made of them at the end of the chapter. Special attention is merited by the Lachish letters which will be discussed below. Even the important Ahiram epitaph, about which there have been some disagreements, is now generally dated in the 12th century, the most recent discussion of the evidence pointing to the end of this century (c. 1100 B. C.).⁵⁸

For the sake of brevity some of the important inscriptions discovered before 1916 (*e. g.*, Ba'al Lebanon plate and Zakir stele of ninth century, Eshmunazar sarcophagus of fifth century, *et al.*) have been omitted from our list.⁵⁹ We may make cursory reference here to the fact that the North Semitic inscriptions, consisting of Phoenician, Old Hebrew (illustrated especially by the Moabite Stone and Siloam inscription) and Aramaic, show continuity of development, and ultimately pass over to the so-called "square character" which became the more or less standard form used by the Jews, for hand-written manuscripts and later in printing, down to the present day.⁶⁰

The Lachish letters constitute one of the most dramatic discoveries pertaining to the history of writing made in

recent years. They have also the most direct bearing upon contemporary Biblical records of any epigraphic materials yet found in Palestine. Consisting of eighteen ink-inscribed sherds, several of them complete, they contain letters written from outposts to an official in command of the garrison defending the city of Lachish against the Chaldean attack of 589 B. C.⁶¹

Besides vividly supplementing Jeremiah's picture of the tense historical situation, these letters furnish direct evidence concerning the ductus employed in writing Hebrew in that prophet's day. The script (Old Hebrew alphabetic, like that of the Ophel ostraca) and the language (representing the dialect of Judah) give us a perfect example of the characters and the very vernacular used by Jeremiah when he "wrote in the book the evidence of the purchase" of Hanameel's field (Jer. 32:10-11). Baruch must also have employed this self-same script and dialect in writing "from the mouth of Jeremiah . . . upon the roll of a book" (36:2-4, 28, 32). It appears from Jer. 36:17-18 that such writing was not a common achievement even among princes, if we may so interpret their astonishment, and also that Baruch used "leaves" of papyrus (36:23; cf. Isa. 8:1).

Just how early papyrus was commonly used in Palestine we cannot tell;⁶² the discovery, also at Lachish, of an inscribed clay seal (Gedaliah seal), belonging to the sixth century B. C. and having on its back a clear impression of the papyrus document to which it had been attached, attests the use of this material for commercial or other correspondence at this time.⁶³

Without doubt the large use of papyrus, so much more perishable than ostraca or stone, accounts for the paucity of epigraphic remains discovered in Palestine and Syria. The situation is slightly relieved by the finding of many brief inscriptions on seals and seal impressions, some of

which throw light on Biblical names and add to our knowledge of the ductus in use during this period.⁶⁴

From the fifth century B. C. we have the first extensive papyrus documents to be found (discovered 1904-07), the interesting Elephantine Papyri.⁶⁵ They are not only of great historical and linguistic importance, but preserve for us the writing of Dispersion Jews of Upper Egypt in a language like that of the Biblical Aramaic of Ezra and Nehemiah. The dry soil of Egypt has since yielded numerous other papyrus documents (literary texts, diplomatic and business records, private letters, etc.) in Aramaic and Hebrew, covering roughly the period from sixth century B. C. to eighth century A. D., and thus giving continuity to the story of writing.⁶⁶ Many Greek papyri found in Egypt reveal the increasing spread and supremacy of the Greek alphabet (originally derived from the Phoenician) which from about the fourth century B. C. onward greatly influenced writing throughout the Near East.⁶⁷

Glancing back over the course of the development which we have traced, more especially the growth of alphabetic writing, we become aware of the organic relation between the most ancient alphabets known and our own modern systems. We see that the revolutionary effects upon writing produced by the introduction of the alphabet, which the Semites of the second millennium B. C. laboriously wrought out and developed, have continued to yield their beneficial results to mankind. Alphabetic writing has not only furnished a most convenient vehicle of expression for the thoughts and communications of men, but hand in hand with it, written in the symbols which it brought into being, have come down the cultural and religious traditions, customs, beliefs which have entered into the fabric of our Western civilization.

The past twenty years of excavation and research have brought such a phenomenal increase in our knowledge of the subject that we await with eager interest every additional epigraphic discovery which gives promise of completing the picture. Many aspects and stages of the process are still in that twilight zone between conjecture and certainty, but the general progress of letters is becoming more and more obvious. Prediction of what the next two decades may bring forth would be ill-advised and hazardous, since a single new discovery may at any moment alter completely certain of the conclusions held hitherto.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Additional bibliographical notes on the inscriptions listed on p. 16 and which are not treated in detail in the text. Numbers correspond to the number in the list, p. 16.

9. Yehimilk inscription:

Montet, *Acad. des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: Comptes rendus* (1929), p. 250; Dunand, *RB*, XXXIX (1930), p. 322, with copy and photograph.

10. Ahiram sarcophagus:

Lidzbarski, *Nachr. Ges. Wiss. Göttingen* (Phil. Kl.), 1923-4, p. 43; *OLZ*, 30 (1927), p. 453; Dussaud, *Syria*, 5 (1924), p. 210; 6 (1925), p. 104; Torrey, *JAOS*, 45 (1925), p. 269; Bauer, *OLZ*, 28 (1925), p. 129; Spiegelberg, *OLZ*, 29 (1926), p. 735; Albright, *JPOS*, 6 (1926), pp. 76-84; 7 (1927), p. 122; Montet, "Byblos et l'Egypte" (1928), Pl. CXXXIX-CXLI; Vincent, *RB*, 24 (1925), p. 183; 25 (1926), p. 463; V. Müller, *AfO*, VII (1931), p. 50.

11. Roueisseh spearhead:

S. Ronzevalle, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, XI (1926), pp. 329-58; Dussaud, *Syria*, VIII (1927), p. 185, with photo.

12. Gezer calendar:

S. Ronzevalle, *op. cit.*, V, p. 2 and Pl. XVI; J. Lindblom, *Acta Academiae Aboensis, Humaniora*, VIII (1931). D. Diringer, "Le Iscrizioni Antico-ebraiche Palestinesi" (Florence, 1934) gives extensive bibliographies on this and some of the following inscriptions.

13. Abibaal inscription:
 Dussaud, *Syria*, V (1924), Pl. XLII; VIII (1927), p. 81;
 Montet, *RB*, 25 (1926), p. 321.

14. Elibaal inscription:
 Dussaud, *Syria*, VI (1925), pp. 101-110 and Pl. XXV; Montet, *RB*, 25 (1926), p. 323; Vincent, *RB*, 25 (1926), p. 462; Torrey, *JAOS*, 46 (1926), p. 237; Lidzbarski, *OLZ*, 30 (1927), p. 453.

15. Samaria ostraca:
 G. A. Reisner, C. S. Fisher, D. G. Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria, 1908-10* (1924), I, p. 239 ff.; Albright, *JPOS*, V (1925), p. 38 ff.; XI (1931), pp. 248 ff.; Noth, *ZDPV* (1927), pp. 211-44.

17. Kilamuwa inscription:
 F. von Luschan, *Ausgr. in Sendschirli*, IV (1911), p. 375; Littmann, *Sitzungsber. Preuss. Ak. Wiss. Berlin* (1911), p. 976; Brockelmann, *ibid.*, pp. 1142 f.; Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, 3 (1902-15), p. 218; Bauer, *ZDMG*, 67 (1913), p. 684; 68 (1914), p. 227; Torrey, *JAOS*, 35 (1915-17), p. 364; Albright, *JPOS*, 6 (1926), pp. 84-5; Montgomery, *JBL*, 47 (1926), p. 196.

19. Jerusalem (Ophel) ostracon:
 S. A. Cook, *PEFQS* (1924), pp. 180-86; Albright, *JPOS*, 6 (1926), pp. 88-93.

NOTES

¹ For discussion supporting precedence of Egyptian civilization see Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums* (Stuttgart, 1926-31, 5 vols.), vol. I, p. 474, and Langdon, *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. I, pp. 462 f.; opposing view by C. L. Woolley, *The Sumerians*, pp. 183 f. (Oxford, 1930), pp. 183 ff.; also by Scharff, *ZÄS*, vol. 17 (1935), pp. 89 f.

² "Hieratic," meaning "sacred" writing, is a misnomer, since this writing was originally, at least, employed for secular purposes.

³ Cf. H. Jensen, *Geschichte der Schrift* (Hanover, 1925), pp. 49 and 187.

⁴ Cf. A. H. Gardiner, "Origin and Development of Egyptian Writing," *JEA*, II (1915), pp. 61 ff.; K. Sethe, "Zur Reform der aegyptischen Schriftlehre," *ZÄS*, XLV (1908), pp. 36 ff.

⁵ Fr. Delitzsch in 1897 attempted to prove that cuneiform did not develop from pictographic writing but through the building-up of a limited number of original conventional signs. Cf. his *Die Entstehung des ältesten Schriftsystems* (Leipzig, 1897). His theory, however, was convincingly disproved by G. A. Barton and others. Cf. Barton, *JAOS*,

XXXIII (1903), pp. 23-28; *ibid.*, *The Origin and Development of Babylonian Writing* (2 parts, Leipzig, 1913).

⁶ Cf. standard edition, J. A. Knudtzon, *Die el-Amarna Tafeln* (Leipzig, 1915).

⁷ Cf. T. G. Pinches, *PEFQS* (1904), pp. 229-244; also C. H. W. Johns, *ibid.* (1905), pp. 206-210.

⁸ Specific treatment of these will be found elsewhere in this volume. Further mention of the Byblian script will be made below, though it should be noted that this script is not truly hieroglyphic.

⁹ For a brief treatment of views held before 1916, see the writer's paper in *Macdonald Presentation Volume* (Princeton University Press, 1933), pp. 181-91, and literature cited there.

¹⁰ Early descriptions and interpretations of this monument were written by Nöldeke, *Die Inschrift des K. Mesa von Moab* (1870); Ginsburg, *The Moabite Stone* (1870); Driver, in *EB*, vol. III, col. 3041; *PEFQS* (1870), pp. 169 ff. and (1871), pp. 281 ff.

¹¹ Cf. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (1906), pp. 129 ff.

¹² Cf. R. F. Butin, K. Lake, R. P. Blake et al. in *Harvard Theol. Rev.*, XXI (1928), pp. 1-61; XXV (1932), pp. 95-203.

¹³ Cf. A. H. Gardiner and A. E. Cowley, *JEA*, III (1916), pp. 1 ff., 17 ff.; also K. Sethe, "Der Ursprung des Alphabets," *Nachr. d. K. Ges. zu Göttingen* (1916), pp. 87-161; Gardiner, *PEFQS* (1929), pp. 48 f.; Cowley, *JEA*, XV (1929), pp. 200 f.; Sethe, *ZDMG*, LXXX (1926), pp. 24-29 (N. F., V.).

¹⁴ Cf. literature cited by H. Jensen, *OLZ*, XXXI (1928), pp. 650-55; Leibovitch, *ZDMG*, LXXXIV (N. F. IX, 1930), pp. 2 f.; Butin, *Harv. Theol. Rev.*, XXV (1932), pp. 131-2; *ibid.*, Studies and Documents, VI, *Excavations and Protosinaaitic Inscriptions at Serabit el Khadem*, ed. by K. Lake (1936), p. 32, n. 2.

¹⁵ So named to distinguish them from the properly-called Sinaitic inscriptions consisting of a large number of Nabatean inscriptions from the first few centuries A.D.

¹⁶ Early attempts at dating these inscriptions began with Petrie who first placed them in the 18th dynasty, c. 1500 B.C. under Thothmes III; Ed. Meyer, following von Bissing, also assigned them to the 18th dynasty; cf. B. L. Ullman *AJA*, XXXVIII (1934), p. 361; K. Sethe thought first of the Hyksos period, following the 12th dynasty, but both he and von Bissing changed later to the earlier dating. The consensus of opinion at present holds to the 12th dynasty date.

¹⁷ H. Grimme stood practically alone in claiming a hieratic basis for the Serabit alphabet. Cf. his *Althebräische Inschriften vom Sinai* (Darmstadt, 1923).

¹⁸ It should be noted that H. Bauer, *OLZ* (1921), pp. 241-246, held the acrophonic principle to be incorrect, and denied any dependence between the Protosinaaitic and Egyptian on one hand and the Semitic and Protosinaaitic on the other. Cf. W. F. Albright's comment on this view

in *JPOS*, XV (1935), p. 335. E. Meyer also, in *Geschichte des Altertums* (1931), vol. II, refused to see any relation between the Serabit letters and the Phoenician alphabet.

¹⁹ *JEA*, XV (1929), p. 217.

²⁰ Cf. the excellent discussion of this point by Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 12-17. Cf. also Butin, *Mizraim*, II (1936), p. 56.

²¹ "Les Inscriptions Protosinaïtiques," *Bull. de l'Inst. d'Egypte*, XVI (1933-4), fasc. 2, pp. 24 ff.

²² Cf. *JPOS*, XV (1935), p. 335. The whole article is one of the most penetrating and suggestive treatments of the subject and deserves careful consideration.

²³ *Studies and Documents*, VI (1936), pp. 32-4. Cf. also Butin's review of Leibovitch's article in *Mizraim*, II (1936), pp. 81-2.

²⁴ Cf. Ex. 34: 28; also Ex. 17: 14.

²⁵ Cf. Sir Charles Marston's *New Bible Evidence* (New York, 1934-5), pp. 178-182.

²⁶ Cf. *Die Lösung des Sinaischriftproblems* (1926).

²⁷ Cf. especially the discussions between Sethe and Grimme in *ZDMG*, LXXX (1926), pp. 24 ff. and 137 ff.

²⁸ Cf. *AfO*, V (1929), p. 237.

²⁹ Cf. *Syria*, XI (1930), pp. 1-10. I. Gelb, *AJSL*, XLVII (1931), p. 135, thinks the script is based on Hittite hieroglyphs.

³⁰ Cf. Albright, *BASOR*, No. 60 (1935), pp. 3-6; *ibid.*, No. 63 (1936), p. 11; *AJA*, XXXVIII (1934), p. 198; *ibid.*, XL (1936), p. 163.

³¹ Cf. *Mélanges Maspero* (Cairo, 1935), vol. I, pp. 567-71. For dating cf. Albright, *BASOR*, No. 63 (1936), pp. 10-11.

³² Cf. evidence given in Z. S. Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17. Note also the bibliography on this subject suggested by Harris in notes accompanying the discussion.

³³ Cf. Butin, *Mizraim*, II (1936), p. 82; Albright, *AfO*, V (1932), pp. 150-52. Cf. also Ullman, *Ancient Writing and its Influence* (1932), p. 12.

³⁴ W. F. Albright published a brief list of this kind in *BASOR*, No. 58 (1935), p. 29.

³⁵ *BASOR*, No. 60 (1935), pp. 5-6; *ibid.*, No. 63 (1936), p. 11.

³⁶ Cf. *PEFQS*, 67 (1935), pp. 128-41; continued in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, LXIX (1937), pp. 43-58.

³⁷ *PEQ*, LXIX, pl. IV.

³⁸ Cf. *18th Memoir of the Egyptian Exploration Fund* (1900), pp. 31-2; also Petrie's *The Formation of the Alphabet* (London, 1912).

³⁹ Cf. Albright's remarks in *BASOR*, No. 60 (1936), p. 5, n. 5.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Syria*, X (1929) and succeeding numbers. Since the Ras Shamra texts will find specific treatment elsewhere in this volume, we shall attempt here only a summary of points essential to the present discussion.

⁴¹ Bauer, *ZDMG*, LXXXIV (N. F. IX, 1930), pp. 251-254, and *Ent-*

zifferung der Keilschrifttafeln von Ras Shamra (Halle, 1930); Dhorme, *RB*, XXXIX (1930), pp. 571-7; *ibid.*, XL (1931), pp. 32-56.

⁴² A. T. Olmstead, in an excursus in *Oriental Institute Communications*, No. 12 (Chicago, 1931), pp. 61-2, claims the derivation of the cuneiform alphabet from the Sinaitic alphabet; E. Ebeling in a paper before the Prussian Academy of Arts and Sciences in January, 1934, attempted to prove derivation of the cuneiform alphabet from Babylonian cuneiform; cf. *JBL*, LIV (March, 1935), p. x; Février, in *Rev. des Etudes Semitiques*, No. 2 (1934), pp. xiii-xvi, tried to show the connection between cuneiform alphabet and South Semitic.

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, p. 11, n. 1 and p. 15.

⁴⁴ *JAOS*, LIII (1933), p. 99. Cf. also Bauer, "Der Ursprung des Alphabets," *Der Alte Orient* (1936, 1/2).

⁴⁵ In 1933, E. Grant discovered a cuneiform tablet at Beth Shemesh which proved to be written in the Canaanite cuneiform script except that it reads from right to left. Cf. *Rumeileh* (Haverford, 1934), p. 27 and p. 29, fig. 2a and Pl. XX. Also *BASOR*, No. 52 (1933), p. 4 ff.; No. 53 (1934), p. 18 ff.; No. 54 (1934), p. 26; *PEFQS* (1934), p. 94 ff. Another similar cuneiform example written right to left is reported by Viroolleaud as found at Ras Shamra in *Syria*, XV (1934), p. 103. As yet no other examples of this alphabet have been found outside Ras Shamra. The Beth Shemesh tablet belongs definitely to Stratum IVa or late V, and therefore dates from the 16th or 15th century, B. C.

⁴⁶ Besides the excellent work of Viroolleaud (cf. *Syria*, X ff.) in making available the transliterations for study, the following may be mentioned: J. Friedrich, *Der Alte Orient*, XXXIII (1933), pp. 25-63; Dussaud, *Rev. de l'hist. des Relig.*, CIV (1931), No. 6, pp. 353-408; CV (1932, No. 2, pp. 245-302; W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, No. 46 (1932), pp. 15-20; No. 50 (1933), pp. 13-20; No. 63 (1936), pp. 23-32; *JPOS*, XII (1932), pp. 185-208; XIV (1934), pp. 101-40; J. A. Montgomery, "Notes on the Mythological Epic Texts from Ras Shamra," *JAOS*, LIII (1933), LIV (1934), LV (1935), *ad loc.*; J. A. Montgoméry and Z. S. Harris, "Ras Shamra Mythological Texts" (Philadelphia, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. IV, 1935), p. 134; H. L. Ginsberg, *Jour. Royal Asiatic Soc.* (Jan. 1935), pp. 45-72; *Kitvê Ugarit* (Jerusalem, 1936), *Mehqarîm leshoniyyîm*, vol. I, pp. 158; J. W. Jack, "The Ras Shamra Tablets, their bearing on the Old Testament," *Old Testament Studies*, No. I (Edinburgh, 1935), pp. 54. Most of the foregoing works give extensive bibliographical references on the subject.

⁴⁷ Specific instances of these correspondences have been indicated, *inter alia*, by Montgomery, *JAOS*, cf. *supra*; Montgomery and Harris, *op. cit.*; W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, cf. *supra*; J. W. Jack, *op. cit.*, Ch. VI; T. H. Gaster, *PEFQS* (1934), pp. 141-8; special mention should be made of H. L. Ginsberg's important studies of Canaanite influence in certain of the Psalms. He has convincingly demonstrated that Ps. 29 and certain features of Pss. 92-99 and others reveal adaptation from North Canaanite

hymns of the Ras Shamra texts. Cf. *Kitvê Ugarit*, pp. 129-131; *JBL*, LVI (Mar. 1937, pt. I), p. iv.

⁴⁸ Two other brief inscriptions, each of four letters, belonging probably to the Middle Bronze Age, have been discovered recently, and should be placed with the Gezer fragment as showing the earliest developments from the Protosinaitic alphabet in Palestine. One of these, inscribed on a limestone plaque was found in 1934 at Shechem in a room of a house of M. B. II period, along with a juglet of Tell el-Yahûdiyeh ware, thus dating it about the 16th century B. C. (Cf. A. Alt, *PJB*, 1935, p. 6; S. Yeivin, "The Palestino-Sinaitic Inscriptions," *PEQ*, 69, Jul. 1937, p. 184). The other presumably M. B. inscription appeared on a bronze dagger from a Tell ed-Duweir (Lachish) tomb when the dagger was cleaned by the Palestinian Museum. It seems to come from the 16-15th century B. C. (Cf. W. F. Albright, *AJA*, XLI, 1937, p. 148, n. 2). The latter inscription has been published in *Antiquity* (Sept. 1937), pp. 359-60, with a photo of the dagger, Pl. xii.

⁴⁹ Cf. W. R. Taylor, *BASOR*, No. 41 (1931), pp. 27-29; Albright, *BASOR*, No. 58 (1935), pp. 28-29; also Butin, *Harv. Theol. Rev.*, XXV (1932), p. 97; *Studies and Documents*, VI (1935), pp. 34-5; Sprengling, *The Alphabet* (Chicago, 1931, Oriental Institute Communications, No. 12), pp. 45, 61.

⁵⁰ Cf. Albright, *AfO*, V (1929), pp. 150-52; *BASOR*, No. 63 (1936), p. 9; Ullman, *Ancient Writing*, p. 12 f.; *AJA*, XXXVIII (1934), pp. 360, 364.

⁵¹ Differences may be noted among the following: Dussaud, *Syria*, XI (1930), p. 392; E. Grant and P. Dhorme, *RB*, XXXIX (1930), pp. 401-2; W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, No. 58 (1935), pp. 28-29; No. 63 (1936), p. 9; *ibid.*, *Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (3rd edit., New York, 1935), pp. 50, 86, n. 74; T. H. Gaster, *PEFQS*, 67 (1935), pp. 134-5; Grimme, *AfO*, XI (1935), pp. 267-81.

⁵² *BASOR*, No. 63 (1936), pp. 9, 11; cf. *AfO*, V (1929), pp. 150-2. Gaster, *PEQ*, 69 (1937), p. 56 and Pl. V, places the Byblos inscription at 1500.

⁵³ Cf. *RB*, XLI (1932), pp. 417-44; XLII (1933), pp. 353-65; *PEFQS* (1934), pp. 76-84; *BASOR*, No. 43 (1931), p. 24.

⁵⁴ *RB*, XLI, *supra*.

⁵⁵ *RB*, XLII, *supra*.

⁵⁶ *JAOS*, LVI (1936), p. 29, n. 8; six reasons are given for this view. Cf. also *BASOR*, No. 63, p. 11.

⁵⁷ *PEQ*, 69 (1937), pp. 49-52.

⁵⁸ *BASOR*, No. 63, p. 8, especially n. 1; cf. *JPOS*, VI (1929), pp. 76-84, for notes on translation.

⁵⁹ Discussion of these is given by Jensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 117 ff.; Z. S. Harris, *op. cit.*, presents the development of the Phoenician script through the Punic and Neo-Punic inscriptions down to the first century A. D.

⁶⁰ Cf. further, Jensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 122 ff.

⁶¹ Cf. J. L. Starkey, *PEFQS*, 67 (1935), pp. 198 ff. and succeeding

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numbers; H. Torczyner, *Bialik Memorial Volume* (Tel-Aviv, 1935); W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, Nos. 58, 61, 62, 63, *ad loc.*; H. L. Ginsberg, *BJPES*, III (1935), pp. 77-86.

⁶² Cf. the interesting discussion by C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (London, 1918), 255-60.

⁶³ *PEFQS*, 67 (1935), pp. 195 ff.; *AJA*, XL (1936), p. 133.

⁶⁴ Cf. seals of Shema, Shebna, Eliakim, Gedaliah, *et al.*, and, *inter alia*, discussions as in *ZAW*, XLVII (1929), p. 16; *JPOS*, VI (1926), pp. 93-102; *JBL*, LI (1932), pp. 77-106; *BASOR*, Nos. 31, 43, 58; *PEFQS*, 67 (1935), pp. 195-207.

⁶⁵ Cf. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (London, 1923).

⁶⁶ For the evolution of the Aramaic cursive script between the sixth and first centuries B.C. cf. W. F. Albright in *JBL*, LVI (Sept., 1937, pt. III).

⁶⁷ Cf. for example Jensen's discussion, *op. cit.*, pp. 165 ff. of the scripts of Asia Minor, among others, derived from the Greek.

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